

**CITY OF ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
HISTORIC DESIGNATION EVALUATION**

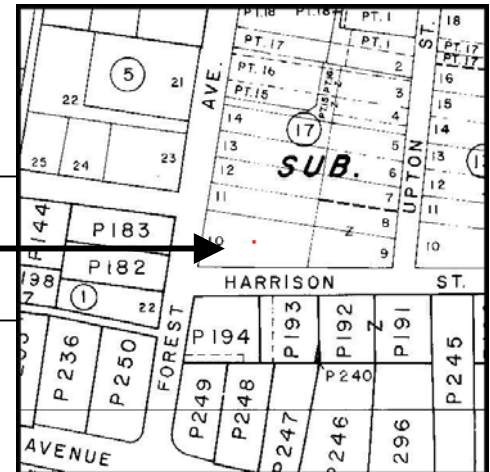
STAFF ANALYSIS

103 Forest Avenue

**September 19, 2002
MEETING NO. 9-02**



103 Forest Avenue



SUBJECT: The Dr. Gilbert V. and Brunetta Hartley House

LOCATION: 103 Forest Avenue, Lot 10, Block 17 Beall's Subdivision

SIZE: 19,475 square feet

OWNER: John G.T. Hartley

MEETING DATE: 7/16/02, continued to 9/19/02

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that 103 Forest Avenue be found eligible for designation as a single site (Landmark) Rockville Historic District in accordance with the adopted criteria.

EVALUATION PROCESS

Notices of the HDC evaluation were sent via first class mail to adjacent and confronting property owners, Citizen's Associations and other interested parties on July 10, 2002. The agenda for the evaluation meeting was also posted on the city's web page and the property was posted.

BACKGROUND

The house at 103 Forest Avenue was co-nominated for historic designation by a neighbor, Thomas Moore, and Peerless Rockville. The Maryland Historical Trust Historic Site Inventory Form (MHT form) was prepared by consultant Gail Littlefield, who stated that the house is architecturally significant as an early Rockville example of the popularized English Arts and Craft/Tudor Revival style. Of particular interest are its roofing details and its asymmetric massing. It is also historically significant as a vestige of the original subdivision of Margaret J. Beall's land to her Dawson relatives. It is associated with the Hartley family. Dr. and Mrs. Gilbert V. Hartley originally bought the land in 1924, after the last Dawson to own it was foreclosed upon. It was occupied by one family only, the Hartleys, and served as Dr. Hartley's medical office when he was in private practice. Dr. Hartley's wife, Brunetta, selected the design for the house and assisted him in the establishment of the medical practice. She died in 1936. Aside from practicing general medicine, Dr. Hartley was also the physician for the County Almshouse. Dr. Hartley's second wife, Estelle, was active in Rockville civic affairs.

September 4, 2002

The house is unique to Rockville and perhaps to Montgomery County for its 1920s “modern” interpretation of a traditional Tudor or Arts and Crafts tradition in its asymmetry, geometric construction, and spatial ambiguity. Its prominent gabled front block is off-center, balanced by flanking end-gabled blocks of slightly shorter stature. This is also evident in the irregular window size and nontraditional placement. Family tradition credits the house design to the taste of Brunetta Hartley and the construction to local builder Harry Howe. The house has not been altered and is in excellent structural condition.

Dr. Gilbert V. Hartley (born 6/24/1894) came to Rockville in 1920, at which time he was one of five practicing physicians in the town. He and his wife Brunetta first rented an apartment over the Rockville post office and later on Monroe Street after he went into practice for himself. They built the house at 103 Forest Avenue in 1925. Aside from his general medical practice, Dr. Hartley was also the on-call physician for the Montgomery County Almshouse, from the 1930s to 1950s.¹ Later he worked for the U.S. Post Office.

Brunetta ter Linden Hartley was born December 12, 1895 and died on February 4, 1936. She is buried in Rockville Cemetery.² In 1938, Gilbert Hartley, widower, transferred the Forest Avenue property to his son John Gilbert ter Linden Hartley, reserving a life tenancy for himself.³ Dr. Hartley gave up his private medical practice after Brunetta’s death. He later married Estelle Ricketts. She was active in civic associations, including being president of the Woman’s Club. She died in 1966, survived by Dr. Hartley and his son and daughter-in-law. Dr. Gilbert Hartley died June 25, 1977, in Rockville, and was buried in Parklawn Cemetery, where Estelle Hartley is also buried.⁴

The house has been used by John Hartley since Dr. Hartley’s death.⁵

SUMMARIES OF COMMENTS ON 103 FOREST AVENUE ON JULY 16, 2002:

Joan Hartley, of 1700 Jumper Court in Vienna, Virginia, introduced herself as the wife of John G. Hartley, owner of the house. She corrected the MHT form and said that the house is really two full stories. She said that the interior has a wonderful charm, which exceeds that of the exterior. She added that the house has not been modernized in any way. The kitchen has the original linoleum floor and no cabinets. The bathroom is original. There is no washer or dryer and the house needs a substantial amount of work. Mrs. Hartley said that the house presents many problems for anyone who would want to live a modern life there. Mrs. Hartley said that the first she had heard about this hearing was from a sign posted at the site. Staff apologized and said that notices had been sent to an address retrieved from state tax data that was incorrect.

Mr. John Hartley stated that he has been living at 103 Forest Avenue on and off for 23 years. He said that the first version of the MHT report is inaccurate in that his father's medical office was on the first floor rather than the second floor; the dimensions and materials used in the house were inaccurate; and some of the family history needed to be corrected. Mr. Hartley said that the house is not currently on the market, although he has received some offers. Mr. Hartley opposed historic designation. He said the house is not

¹ Transcript of oral history of Dr. Hartley taken 11/5/1975 by Eileen McGuckian, MCHS oral history files.

² MCHS cemetery card files.

³ 711/186,187, 9/26/38, through George Spates.

⁴ MCHS biography vertical files.

⁵ Ibid.

historic and he does not want to designate it as historic because he does not want anyone else putting restrictions on it.

Thomas Moore, 11 Forest Avenue, co-nominator, stated that he lives directly across from the subject property. He said the house at 103 Forest Avenue is an important part of the streetscape. He has received many inquiries from passersby about possible sale of the house and interest in purchasing it. Mr. Moore said that he believes the house meets the historic designation criteria and is an excellent component of the neighborhood.

Eileen McGuckian, representing Peerless Rockville and co-nominator, also stated that the property meets the architectural and cultural criteria and that it is an architectural gem. She said that its eligibility is strengthened by the unchanged nature of the house. She said that she had had the pleasure of interviewing Dr. Gilbert Hartley and she hoped that the second generation of Hartleys would continue to preserve the property. Ms. McGuckian encouraged the HDC to vote favorably for recommending designation. She added that preservation concerns in the 1970s were almost entirely confined to preserving 19th century structures and now it is considered important to look at the 20th century. She said Peerless Rockville and other organizations are doing research to find ways to add to existing districts and create new ones

William Jacob, 112 Forest Avenue, spoke in favor of historic designation for the 103 Forest Avenue house. He feels it is a very important part of the streetscape and a very interesting house. He said that his house is also in the district and he has not found the HDC process to be restrictive. He remarked that it enhances the value of the house and the neighborhood. He said that the old houses are unique resources for the City and do a lot to strengthen the community. Mr. Jacob told the Hartleys that they are actually lucky that nothing has been done to modernize their house because he has spent a great deal of time undoing poorly crafted "improvements" to his own house.

Robert Manning, 106 North Van Buren Street, stated that he lives in a house of comparable age to 103 Forest Avenue. He wanted to know what triggered this evaluation and expressed concern that someone's home could be nominated and designated historic without the owner's consent. Co-nominator Thomas Moore said that this particular nomination resulted from rumors that the property might be for sale and that there was interest in razing the house and subdividing the lot to allow for more houses. Mr. Hartley responded that the City would only allow two lots at the most.

Don Hadley, 215 Harrison Street, stated that he is a contiguous neighbor to 103 Forest Avenue. He said that he has also received many comments from people who are interested in buying the house. He said that he has respect for his neighbors' rights and he is concerned about government intervention, but he is also concerned that the house could be torn down by a developer and as many as three new lots created. He said that this would be possible for the 19,450 square foot lot in the R-60 zone. Mr. Hadley said that large new houses on tight lots on that block would be detrimental to the neighborhood.

Jennifer Kaye, 100 Forest Avenue, favored designation. She said that the fine for demolishing a house in Rockville is too small and needs to be increased.

No additional comments were submitted prior to the closing of the record at the close of business on August 1, 2002.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION:

Staff concurs with the nominators and letter of support from Peerless Rockville that 103 Forest Avenue meets the criteria for designation as a single site local historic district by the City of Rockville. Staff regrets the errors in the initial inventory form, but has corrected it and added the information supplied by Mr. and Mrs. Hartley. The corrected form is on the City web site.

The neighborhood is in favor of designation as an asset to the area. The Hartleys are opposed to the designation, primarily for the additional oversight and potential restrictions, which could impact current and future residential use of the property and its prospects for future sale. The Hartleys did not have complete information on the pros and cons of historic designation before the first HDC meeting in July. Staff has discussed these concerns with the Harleys and concluded that historic designation, although it does add an additional layer of review, would not prevent the Hartleys or subsequent owners from improving and modernizing the property for residential use. Properly designed additions have been constructed on most houses in the historic district to add family rooms and modern conveniences. State tax credits would pay 20% of the upgrades to the kitchen, bathrooms and utility systems as well as for maintenance, and the County will credit 10% of exterior maintenance to property taxes owed. Tax credits generally help in improving a historic house and are a desirable selling point for those who wish to purchase a little altered period home and rehabilitate it to their taste.

The HDC does not encourage subdivision of historic properties or destruction of historic resources and any subdivision application would also be subject to other Rockville regulations and laws. Subdivision of the property would require review by the HDC and compliance with Section 25-749(6), which requires the average lot area and lot frontage of lots within 500 feet to be maintained. This provision is likely to restrict the subdivision of the property. If designated, any request for demolition must be approved by the HDC.